

COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Commission on Youth

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Delegate Peace announces passage of Commission on Youth legislation by the House and Senate of Virginia

RICHMOND – Delegate Christopher K. Peace, Chairman of the Virginia Commission on Youth, is pleased to announce the passage of legislation in both the House of Delegates and the Senate of Virginia that will assist Virginia's juvenile and domestic relations district courts in determining appropriate services and sanctions for juveniles offenders. House Bill 183 has passed the House of Delegates and Senate Bill 128 has passed the Senate of Virginia. These bills are identical and originated from recommendations made by the Virginia Commission on Youth's study – *Assessment of Mental Health Needs of Juvenile Offenders*.

House Bill 183, patroned by Delegate Peter Farrell, and Senate Bill 128, patroned by Senator Barbara Favola, requires judges to take into consideration the social history of a juvenile before committing the juvenile to the Department of Juvenile Justice. In Virginia, the social history report is critical in making informed dispositions for juveniles with mental health treatment needs. This legislation improves disposition planning for juveniles by providing information of any identified mental health needs, concerns about the juvenile's emotional and physical health, and information about treatment services prior to committing a juvenile. Delegate Barbara Favola stated, "A social history provides insights into a youth's educational, mental health, and family background. These are all critical factors in creating an effective rehabilitation program, which is the goal of the juvenile justice system."

A major finding from the Commission's study was that in 2012, over 60% of males and 80% of females committed to the Department of Juvenile Justice had significant symptoms of a mental health disorder. In addition, 63% of males and 58% of females had history of psychotropic medication use. "Because of the number of juveniles with mental health disorders entering the juvenile justice system, it is imperative that the court receives information regarding the juvenile's mental health condition including any history of substance abuse and exposure to trauma," stated Delegate Peter Farrell.

Speaking about the Commission's legislation, Delegate Peace stated, "Virginia must adopt policies and practices that address the needs of youth with mental health concerns involved in the juvenile justice system. Preventive approaches are frequently less costly and more effective. I am proud of the Commission's bipartisan support for this legislation and congratulate Senator Favola and Delegate Farrell for their leadership in the area of children's mental health."

Additional information about the Commission on Youth and the Commission's initiatives can be obtained on the Commission's website at <http://vcoy.virginia.gov>.

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